

# Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on Security Policies in Europe

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# I. Introduction

Five years have passed since the Russian Federation annexed the Crimea. The annexation of the Crimea by the Kremlin turned out to be the most serious breach of European borders since the Second World War. Russia violated the fundamental principles of international law, its international obligations and bilateral agreements with Ukraine. The annexation has sharply increased instability of the European security environment, created new dividing lines and greatly enhanced the risk of the destruction of the existing world order. A proper understanding of how the annexation of the Crimea affected Europe's policy and shaped its response can provide essential insights to measure the effectiveness of its approach to ensuring the European security.

The following paper will assess how the annexation of the Crimea affected the EU and its member-states policy. By taking an interdisciplinary and critical look at the impact the annexation of the Crimea made on Europe, the paper aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1) How coherent and effective is the non-recognition and sanction-based policy of the EU?
- 2) How has the annexation of the Crimea impacted the narrative and political decisions in security field adopted by Russia understanders and Russia opponents among the EU member states?
- 3) How do the EU response and the EU member states' position contribute to the European security?

At the end of the paper particular recommendations on how to ensure Europe's own political, energetic and informational security are presented.

## II. The Annexation of the Crimea: Background and Implications

The strategic importance of the Crimean peninsula was realized thousands of years ago. Its geopolitical location almost in the centre of the Black Sea between the Caucasus and Southern Europe as well as the wealth of natural resources makes it strategically important. A significant portion of Russia's navy stationed in Sevastopol and the ethnic diversity of the Crimea with the largest population of ethnic Russians within Ukraine and a strong Muslim minority of the Crimean Tatars turned it into the most sensitive issue in Ukraine–Russia relations which could easily explode.

At different times the Crimea was owned by the Tauris, Cimmerians, Greeks, Scythians, Romans, Huns, Goths, Bulgarians, Tatars, Slavs and other peoples. Its history as part of the Russian Empire started in 1783 when Catherine the Great annexed it from the Ottoman Empire. In 1921, the Crimea became the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, part of the Soviet Union. Thirty-three years later, in 1954, Nikita Khrushchev transferred the Crimea to Ukraine in a move hailed as a “noble act on behalf of the Russian people. When Ukraine held a referendum in December 1991, 54 % of the Crimean residents favoured the independence from the Soviet Union. It was a majority, but the lowest one found in Ukraine. Thus the Crimea became part of independent Ukraine with significant autonomy including its own constitution and parliament. In 1997, Ukraine and Russia signed a bilateral Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership, which formally allowed Russia to keep its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. From 1997 to 2014, the situation in the Crimea was considered under control.

However, the second decade of the XXI century has marked a shift in Russian military mindset. A refusal to accept Western dominance alongside with a more active form of resistance has been deeply embedded in a new doctrine articulated by Chief of Russian General Staff Valery Gerasi-

mov in his article “The Value of Science is in the Foresight”. Based on the lessons of the Georgia conflict, he described a framework of the new operational concept as the role of “Non-Military Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts”<sup>1</sup> According to V. Gerasimov, Russia heavily relies on proxy forces, both paramilitary and cyber, supported by media institutions and companies, Spetsnaz and Cossack fighters to conduct different types of operations, like unconventional, information, psychological and cyber operations, as well as security forces assistance and strategic communication. Due to the fact that the proxy forces consist of a mixture of Russians and ethnic Russians abroad, Russia not only exploits social conditions, but also cultural and linguistic factors in former Soviet states and at home to create proxy forces.<sup>2</sup> The open use of forces often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation is resorted to only at a certain phase, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict. Altogether, the new generation warfare concept by V. Gerasimov has six phases which proved to be a successful approach in taking over the Crimea from Ukraine.

Main part in the Russian operation was the media campaign to gain support in the Crimea and Russia and to isolate the government of Ukraine. Television and the Internet were the dominant news media in Ukraine. The Russian information campaign started with the comparison of the Ukrainian government and their Western allies to Nazis, gays, Jews and other groups of people that Russia claimed were part of the conspiracy.<sup>3</sup> Russia showed swastikas on billboards and in the media to compare the

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<sup>1</sup> GERASIMOV VALERY, The value of Science is in the Foresight, Военно-Промышленный Курьер of 26 February 2013 <[www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632](http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632)>.

<sup>2</sup> SELHORST TONY, Russia's Perception Warfare, Militaire Spectator of 22 April 2016. <<https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/strategie-operaties/artikel/russias-perception-warfare>>.

<sup>3</sup> YUHAS ALAN, Russian Propaganda over the Crimea and the Ukraine: How Does it Work?, The Guardian of 17 March 2014. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/17/the-Crimea-crisis-russia-propaganda-media>>.

government to Nazi Germany. Russian media used past events to emphasize how aggressive NATO and the West were and how these powers violated agreements on NATO expansion restrictions into Eastern Europe.

The annexation of the Crimea has serious implications for Ukraine and Europe in all areas. In the economic area, the annexation of the Crimea and further Russia's military actions in Donbas led to the displacement of 1.5 million registered Ukrainians, who have become a challenge not only for Ukrainian economy but also for the neighbouring EU member-states. In the energetic area, the annexation of the Crimea led to the breakdown of energetic ties between Ukraine and Russia which might pose a challenge to the energy security of the other European states benefitting from transit routes via Ukraine's and their territory. In the military area, Russia can now block the Black Sea Straits in the South-West strategic direction, using forces located on the Crimean peninsula. In the geopolitical area, the annexation of the Crimea demonstrated that European states security might be also challenged by Russia. Although the Crimean scenario is unlikely to be repeated in other European countries, Russia's efforts to interfere in their internal affairs (especially in those countries which either have Russian-speaking population or common energetic and economic interests) via disinformation campaigns with the purpose to destabilize the situation and challenge the unity of the EU will be more unwearying. That actualizes the search for a proper response of the EU to the Kremlin's actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity.

### III. The EU's Response to the Annexation of the Crimea

#### I. EU Non-recognition policy

The EU has demonstrated its strong commitment to support Ukraine since 2014. The EU conclusions, high-level statements and declarations have been used to address actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity, human rights violations and the infringement of navigational rights in Ukraine's territorial waters.

The situation in the Crimea was first addressed by the EU during the extraordinary meeting of the EU Heads of State on 6 March, 2014. In the joint statement, the EU leaders condemned Russia's unprovoked violation of the Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and called on Russia to immediately withdraw its armed forces and allow immediate access for international monitors.<sup>4</sup>

The violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity has become the key message in the numerous EU conclusions, high-level statements and declarations especially when the attention of the international community shifted from the Crimea to Eastern Ukraine. However, since the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine, the EU has been rather vocal in its support of any negotiating format in regard to the conflict in Donbas, whereas the issue of the Crimea remains non-negotiable. In this regard there are serious doubts as to the consistency of the EU's posi-

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<sup>4</sup> Extraordinary meeting of EU Heads of State or Government on Ukraine of 6 March 2014, <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2014/03/06/>>.

tion towards the annexed peninsula as “the EU insists on dividing the two issues, Donbas and the Crimea” and omitting “the Crimean case from the current discussions”.<sup>5</sup>

The human rights violations have also been a topic of consistently keen interest. Since the Russian attack against the Crimea, the European Parliament has paid close attention to the situation of the Crimean Tatars. Meanwhile, the European Parliament resolutions adopted in 2014 only vaguely addressed the human rights-related activities. The rapidly developing territorial conflict overshadowed other concerns. Five years on from the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU adopted the Declaration on the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea and the city of Sevastopol 17 March 2019 which states that the human rights situation in the Crimean peninsula has significantly deteriorated. Residents of the peninsula face systematic restrictions of fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, religion or belief and association and the right to peaceful assembly. The Declaration also confirms the grave violations of rights of the Crimean Tatars through the shutting down of the Crimean Tatar media outlets, the banning of the activities of the Mejlis, their self-governing body, and the persecution of its leaders and members of their community.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the Declaration contains nothing but the EU expectations that Russia will reverse its decisions and end the pressure on the Crimean Tatar community.

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<sup>5</sup> IVASHCHENKO-STADNIK KATERYNA, PETROV ROMAN, RIEKER PERNILLE, RUSSO ALESSANDRA. Implementation of the EU’s crisis response in Ukraine. 2018. <<http://www.eunpack.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2018-01-31%20D6.3%20Working%20paper%20on%20implementation%20of%20EU%20crisis%20response%20in%20Ukraine.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> Declaration by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU on the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol of 17 March 2019, <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/03/17/declaration-by-the-high-representative-federica-mogherini-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-autonomous-republic-of-crimea-and-the-city-of-sevastopol/>>.

The infringement of navigational rights in Ukraine's territorial waters has also appeared to one of the topics in the declarations and resolutions initiated by the EU. On 24 October 2018, the European Parliament adopted the Resolution which expressed its very serious concern about the very volatile security situation in the Sea of Azov and condemned the excessive stopping and inspection of commercial vessels, including both Ukrainian ships and those with flags of third-party states.<sup>7</sup> The resolution had no effect on further Russia actions in the Sea of Azov and did not stop Kremlin from using of force a month later when Russian forces fired on and seized two Ukrainian gunboats and one tug after the Ukrainian vessels tried to pass under the Kerch Strait Bridge.

In December 2018, following the events of 25 November, the European Parliament adopted the resolution on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine. It strongly condemned the deliberate act of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on 25 November 2018 in the Kerch Strait and called on the EU and its Member States to close access to EU ports for Russian ships coming from the Sea of Azov if Russia did not re-establish freedom of navigation through the Kerch Strait and in the Sea of Azov.<sup>8</sup>

On 17 June 2019, the Council adopted the Conclusions on the Black Sea confirming again that the EU policy decisions and its non-recognition policy on the illegal annexation of the Crimea are fundamental to the EU's approach to regional cooperation in the Black Sea area.<sup>9</sup> However, the document remains silent on what exactly the EU is willing to do about Russia's unlawful actions in the Kerch Strait.

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<sup>7</sup> European Parliament resolution (2018/2870(RSP)) on the situation in the Sea of Azov of 24 October 2018, <[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-8-2018-0493\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-8-2018-0493_EN.html)>.

<sup>8</sup> European Parliament resolution (2017/2283(INI)) on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine of 12 December 2018, <[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0518\\_EN.html?redirect](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0518_EN.html?redirect)>.

<sup>9</sup> Council Conclusions on the EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation of 17 June 2019, <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39779/st10219-en19.pdf>>.

## 2. EU Sanctions Policy

The non-recognition policy is rather seldom introduced in isolation from other foreign policy instruments such as restrictive measures. Since March 2014, the EU has progressively imposed restrictive measures against Russia in response to the annexation of the Crimea. The first set of restrictive measures was imposed against 21 Russian and Ukrainian officials responsible for actions threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity. The same year the EU adopted a package of targeted economic sanctions which included a ban on imports of goods originating in the Crimea or Sevastopol unless they have Ukrainian certificates; a prohibition to invest in the Crimea, a ban to buy real estate or entities in the Crimea, finance the Crimean companies or supply related services, a ban to invest in infrastructure projects in the following sectors: transport; telecommunications; energy, exploration and production of oil, gas and mineral resources; a ban on providing tourism services in the Crimea; a ban on exporting transport, telecommunications and resources to the Crimea; a ban on providing technical assistance, brokering, construction or engineering services related to infrastructure in the Crimea.

In late November 2018, a new Crimean crisis challenged the international community. Russian coast guard ships opened fire on a group of vessels of the Ukrainian Navy in international waters as they were leaving the Kerch Strait.<sup>10</sup> However, it took the EU almost 4 months to renew sanctions over actions on 15 March 2019 to add eight Russian officials to the list of those subject to restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and indepen-

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<sup>10</sup> Ukraine urges EU to impose new sanctions on Russia over attack near Kerch Strait, UNIAN of 26 November 2018, <<https://www.unian.info/politics/10351809-ukraine-urges-eu-to-impose-new-sanctions-on-russia-over-attack-near-kerch-strait.html>>.

dence of Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> On 20 June 2019, Council prolonged the restrictive measures introduced in response to the illegal annexation of the Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia until 23 June 2020.

However, there are particular weak spots in the sanctions regime. The EU is not expected to only condemn the party of the conflict but rather demonstrate how much pain can be tolerated. According to Paul Kalinichenko, the EU sanctions in response to the actions threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity and Russia's countersanctions have frozen negotiations and consequently have not achieved anything.<sup>12</sup> The sanctions have neither stopped the annexation nor restrained Russia from taking further aggressive steps.

Besides, tighter implementation is required. In 2015 and 2016, Siemens sold gas turbines to Russia, four of which were later installed in Russia-annexed the Crimea. In May 2018, the construction of Nord Stream 2, which will deliver gas to Europe from northern Russia's Yamal Peninsula, started. Vessels from several EU member states have repeatedly infringed the sanctions by docking in the Crimean ports. The sanctions remain rather soft and thus fail to destroy the relations between the EU and Russia in such areas as energy, investments and manufactured goods trade.

Last but not least, most sanctions have been imposed in regard to such violations of international law as actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity, although breaches of human rights have been present so far. The EU addresses human rights violations by adopting particular conclusions and declarations rather than deploying restrictive measures. Hope-

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<sup>11</sup> Ukraine: EU responds to escalation at the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov, and renews sanctions over actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity of 15 March 2019, <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/03/15/ukraine-eu-responds-to-escalation-at-the-kerch-straits-and-the-azov-sea-and-renews-sanctions-over-actions-against-ukraine-s-territorial-integrity/>>.

<sup>12</sup> KALINICHENKO PAUL, Post-Crimean Twister: Russia, the EU and the Law of Sanctions. *Russian Law Journal*. 2017;5(3):9-28, <<https://doi.org/10.17589/2309-8678-2017-5-3-9-28>>.

fully, after the adoption of the EU Global Human Rights Act further sanctions in response to human rights violations in the Crimea will be considered.

#### IV. Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on the EU Member States

There is a clear gap in geopolitical orientations and political dynamics between those member-states that do see the security threat from annexation of the Crimea, and those who put greater weight in the role of Russia as a security provider or economic partner. However, there is still no consent among experts on the composition of both camps (Russia accusers and Russia understanders).

According to Andrey Makarychev and Stefano Braghiroli,<sup>13</sup> there are four groups of “Russia understanders” in Europe. The first group is pragmatic; mostly its members dominate in Germany, France, Italy, and Finland. Members of this group are associated with the economic and political interests of businesses seeking new opportunities in Russian markets. The second group includes those that have a political identity, largely based on ethnic and / or civilizational affinity with Russia. They are most common in places like Latvia and Estonia, as well as Bulgaria and Greece. The third group includes some leftist, neo-Marxist and communist parties in Western Europe, such as the left party in Germany and the Italian and French communists. They view the struggle between Russia and the West as one of two competing hegemonies. They tend to give preference to the Crimean citizens in their alleged fight against “fascism”. The fourth group includes the far-right parties, such as the National Front in France, Vlaams Belang in Belgium, Jobbik in Hungary, Ataka in Bul-

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<sup>13</sup> BRAGHIROLI STEFANO, MAKARYCHEV ANDREY, “Russia and its supporters in Europe: a trans-ideology a-la-carte?” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Volume 16, Issue 2, March 2016.

garia, the National Democratic Party in Germany, the Northern League and Forza Nuova in Italy, the Freedom Party in Austria, the Golden Dawn in Greece and the British National Party.

According to the Kremlin Watch Report 2017,<sup>14</sup> there are three states that act Kremlin-friendly (Greece, Italy, Cyprus) and two governments that are using the Russian card for domestic reasons (Slovakia, Hungary). The authors of the report also specifies the group of 14 countries clearly concerned with Russian aggression but at the same time missing a leader (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, United Kingdom, Denmark Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Germany, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria) .

The present study will focus on evaluating public statements and actions taken by Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Visegrad Group and Baltic States with the aim to assess the impact of annexation of the Crimea on their security policies and the level of their alignment with the official Brussels course.

## I. Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on the Security Policy of Germany

The official rhetoric of Berlin so far has been critical towards Russia's actions in Ukraine. White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr (2016) stresses that Russia is openly calling the European peace order into question with its willingness to use force to advance its own interests and to unilaterally redraw borders guaranteed under international law, as it has done in the Crimea. This has far-

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<sup>14</sup> Kremlin Watch Report 2017. How do European democracies react to Russian aggression? Review of shifts in strategic & policy documents of EU28 following Russian aggression against Ukraine. <<https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/How-do-European-democracies-react-to-Russian-aggression.pdf>>.

reaching implications for security in Europe and thus for the security of Germany.<sup>15</sup> Besides, Germany has been engaged in mediation efforts in cooperation with France over the situation in Ukraine. No less importantly, Germany has taken a leading role in implementing the EU sanctions against Russia.

However, the implications of Russia's unlawful actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity for Germany's security (and also European one) should be mainly assessed in the energy area. Russia is Germany's largest energy supplier. Germany imports nearly 40% of its natural gas from Russia and around a third of its oil and coal as well. Since September 2015 when Russia, Germany and a consortium of Western companies signed an agreement for the implementation of Nord Stream 2 project, it has turned into a sensitive issue as, on the one hand, it meets EU need in diversification of its routes but, on the other one, weakens the position of such transit countries as Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia. The German government has repeatedly claimed that the project should not be politicized. According to German government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer, Nord Stream-2 is a commercial project.<sup>16</sup> However, to regard Nord Stream 2 as a commercial project would be to ignore its repercussions. It is obvious, that while construction is a matter for Gazprom and its European partners, it is up to Germany and the EU to address the repercussions which might be quite serious not only for Berlin's future energy security but also other European countries which will lose their status as transit ones.

According to the Kremlin Watch Report 2017, there are two concepts for Germany's approach towards Russia – one considers Russia to be Germany's strategic partner and makes reference to Ostpolitik, the other

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<sup>15</sup> White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, 2016 <<https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/resource/MzEzNTM4MmUzMzMyM-mUzMTM1MzMyZTM2MzIzMzMDMwMzAzMDMwMzAzMDY5NzE3MzMINjc2NDYyMzMyMDI-wMjAyMDIw/2016%20White%20Paper.pdf>>.

<sup>16</sup> Germany says still sees Nord Stream 2 as primarily commercial venture, KyivPost of 19 September 2018, <<https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/reuters-spokeswoman-says-germany-still-sees-nord-stream-2-as-primarily-commercial-venture.html>>.

doubts the significance and sees Russia as a state with a substantial potential for destructive action. Generally speaking, the first concept is popular amongst Social Democrats, the Left Party and Alternative for Germany; while the second amongst Merkel's Christian Democrats and the Greens. The two concepts find their supporters among ordinary citizens. Thus 60% of Germans are for closer ties between Russia and the EU.<sup>17</sup> However, only 13 % of Germans are not worried about Russia's military threat.<sup>18</sup> Obviously, German political establishment and public opinion is highly divided into those who treat Russia positively and those who regard Russia as a threat. That will also "demotivate other EU Member States from being tougher on the Russians, who will be increasingly pleased by the lack of a clear red line to their expansionist policies in the region".<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on the Security Policy of France

Before the annexation of the Crimea, French diplomacy had been working at developing the political, economic, and even military relations with Russia. The sale contract of French warships, the Mistral, was the main achievement of French-Russian cooperation. However, in 2014 after the annexation of the Crimea, F. Hollande announced the suspension of the sale. In September 2015, the French National Assembly approved the can-

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<sup>17</sup> Russia and Europe: Rapprochement or Isolation. The results of a representative survey conducted by TNS Infratest Politikforschung in Germany and Russia, March 2016, <[https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/koerber-stiftung/mediathek/pdf/2016/Survey\\_Russia-in-Europe.pdf](https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/koerber-stiftung/mediathek/pdf/2016/Survey_Russia-in-Europe.pdf)>.

<sup>18</sup> SIMMONS KATIE, STOKES BRUCE, POUSSHTER JACOB, NATO Public Opinion: Wary of Russia, Leery of Action on Ukraine of 10 June 2015, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/06/10/1-nato-public-opinion-wary-of-russia-leary-of-action-on-ukraine/>>.

<sup>19</sup> HÄRTEL ANDRÉ, Germany and the crisis in Ukraine: divided over Moscow? Elcano Royal Institute, 2014, <[http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_en/content?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/zonas\\_in/ari24-2014-hartel-germany-ukraine-crisis-divided-over-moscow](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari24-2014-hartel-germany-ukraine-crisis-divided-over-moscow)>.

cellation of the sale of the Mistral warships, which had been negotiated directly with Russia beforehand.<sup>20</sup> In 2014, French president François Hollande was among the first who condemned Russia's annexation of the Crimea, declaring in a statement that France does not recognise a new status for the Crimea.<sup>21</sup>

Russia's actions against territorial integrity of Ukraine constituted not only a security challenge for Paris but also opened the window of opportunity for French diplomacy. In June 2014, the new Ukrainian president P. Poroshenko was invited by the French president F. Hollande to the commemoration ceremony of the 1944 Normandy landing.<sup>22</sup> This invitation is seen as the first attempt at getting the warring parties Ukraine and Russia together whereas France played a key role in creating contacts between Ukraine and Russia. This initiative can be considered as the main accomplishment for French diplomacy as it led to the formation of the Normandy format, a diplomatic quartet of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France. Although Paris has managed to become a diplomatic power in Europe, there is still little effectiveness of the negotiations in the Normandy format. Besides, the issue of the Crimea has not been by the parties.

The new French President Emmanuel Macron has taken a harsher stance against Russia than his predecessors. While Macron held a cautious view of Russia throughout the Presidential campaign, his view has hardened after the election. The fact that E. Macron experienced Russian meddling during his campaign made the new president more concerned about the

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<sup>20</sup> MATHEVON ELISE, Turning East? French Involvement in Ukraine, EuroMaidanPress of 28 April 2016, <<http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/04/28/turning-east-french-involvement-in-ukraine/>>.

<sup>21</sup> "Putin's Mein Kampf" - How the world reacted to Russia's annexation of the Crimea, 19 March 2014, <<https://www.thejournal.ie/the-the-crimea-in-quotes-1369486-Mar2014/>>.

<sup>22</sup> MATHEVON ELISE, Turning East? French Involvement in Ukraine, EuroMaidanPress of 28 April 2016, <<http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/04/28/turning-east-french-involvement-in-ukraine/>>.

issue how to effectively counteract Russia's disinformation. For this purpose in January 2018, President Macron proposed an anti-fake news election law.

Five years after the annexation of the Crimea, France issued a statement which states that it does not recognize and will not recognize the illegal annexation of the Crimea, and remains firmly committed to the full restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

Condemning all cases of discrimination based on belonging to an ethnic or religious community, France called for the release of all persons who were detained in violation of international law, as well as for preservation and protection of the historical and cultural heritage of the Crimea.

Although the new President is much tougher on Russia, the public opinion in France remains more open to Russian narratives on Ukraine. Two important political forces, the Republican Party under its presidential candidate Francois Fillon and the far-right extremist National Front and its leader Marine Le Pen, fiercely criticized the EU's sanctions policy and called for rapid normalization of relations with Russia.<sup>24</sup>

The series of the latest events, such as the announcement about Marine Le Pen's visit to Yalta in February 2019, publication of the map with the Crimea as part of Russia by Agence France Presse and the visits of the members of the French Parliament to the Crimea at the event on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the annexation of the Crimea, demonstrate the real degree of ambiguity in French society on Russia's actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity.

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<sup>23</sup> France Issued a Statement in Connection with the Fifth Anniversary of the Annexation of the Ukrainian the Crimea, 19 March 2019, <<https://qha.com.ua/en/novosti-en/france-issued-a-statement-in-connection-with-the-fifth-anniversary-of-the-annexation-of-the-ukrainian-crimea/>>.

<sup>24</sup> FISCHER SABINE, The End of European Bilateralisms: Germany, France, and Russia, Carnegie Moscow Centre of 12 December 2017, <<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/74950>>.

### 3. Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on the Security Policy of Italy

Italy's internal and external policy after the annexation of the Crimea does not fit into the overall EU approach. According to the Kremlin Watch Report 2017, the "partnership" between Italy and Russia is based on the precondition that neither Russia nor Italy Italy's only real interest in Eastern neighbourhood is to avoid the most dangerous scenario of the NATO involvement in Ukraine – something that could have disastrous consequences for Italy's relations with Russia.

In 2015, the Italian Ministry of Defence issued a White Paper on International Security and Defence. A document of this strategic level was prepared for the first time in 30 years. In general, the rhetoric of the document advocates a militaristic approach to guaranteeing national security. What is interesting, Russia was not mentioned in it at all.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, according to Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 44% of Italian citizens believe that Russia is a threat to neighbouring countries. Italy is also a fierce opponent of the idea of supplying weapons to Ukraine, and in this issue the position of the Italian government completely coincides with the mood of voters: 65% of Italian citizens oppose such a decision, and only 22% are in favour of it.<sup>26</sup>

Besides, Italy has strong economic interests in trade with Russia. Not surprisingly, Italy is the most ardent opponent of the sanctions among all the EU Member States. First, it has become the first EU Member State which made lifting of sanctions against Russia part of its coalition agreement. Vice Prime Minister Matteo Salvini did not miss the opportunity to emphasize the damage of sanctions, as well as the need to lift them,

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<sup>25</sup> White Paper for International Security and Defence 2015 <[http://www.difesa.it/Primo\\_Piano/Documents/2015/07\\_Luglio/White%20book.pdf](http://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Documents/2015/07_Luglio/White%20book.pdf)>.

<sup>26</sup> SIMMONS KATIE, STOKES BRUCE, POUSSHTER JACOB, NATO Public Opinion: Wary of Russia, Leery of Action on Ukraine of 10 June 2015, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/06/10/1-nato-public-opinion-wary-of-russia-leary-of-action-on-ukraine/>>.

having paid two visits to Moscow since he took his post in late May 2018. According to the Italy's Ministry of Economic Development, in 2018, Italy was the sixth supplier country of Russia. After 2013, Italian exports to Russia decreased by three billion euros per year. However, in 2017 there was a change: Italian exports to Russia grew by 19.3%, and investments increased from 27 to 36 billion euros. This positive trend is due to the fact that, because of the need to adapt to the system of sanctions, many Italian companies began to export to countries such as Serbia or Belarus, which then sell their products to Russia.<sup>27</sup> In addition to this, in 2016, during the St. Petersburg forum, Italy signed agreements worth over one billion euros with Russia, and in 2017, cooperation in the power industry led to the conclusion of agreements between Enel and Rosseti on innovative solutions for high-tech electrical networks. In 2018, important agreements were concluded in the energy sector, wind energy infrastructure (between Eni and the Stavropol Territory), research (between Eni and the Russian railways, between Rosneft and the Polyclinic Institute of Turin) and technological development. Furthermore, in September 2018, during the first official visit of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte to Moscow, 13 agreements were signed for an amount of about 1.5 billion euros.<sup>28</sup>

Although Italy has never adopted any official document which will recognize the actions of Russia in the Crimea as legitimate, there have been repeated statements made by the Italian officials which put Rome at odds with both Kyiv and Brussels. In 2018, the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of Italy Matteo Salvini, in an interview with the Washington Post, called the occupation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation

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<sup>27</sup> ARGANO MARIA ELENA, European Union – Russia: a two-level relationship 2019, <<https://eyes-on-europe.eu/russia-eu-eu-logos/>>.

<sup>28</sup> Istituto Affari Internazionali Website, Le Relazioni tra Italia e Russia <[https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/pi\\_a\\_0144.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/pi_a_0144.pdf)>.

legitimate.<sup>29</sup> This approach shows ambiguity and does not benefit either European unity or Italy's credibility as a reliable international partner for Western allies.

#### 4. Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on the Security Policy of Greece

In the context of the Crimea annexation Greece reluctantly takes sides with the larger EU states, while simultaneously lobbying in favour of removing sanctions and renewing dialogue with Russia. Presenting the priorities of the Greek EU Council presidency for the first half of 2014, neither Eastern Partnership nor Ukraine was on the list. When the annexation of The Crimea took place, Foreign Minister Venizelos visited Ukraine and supported sanctions as well as expressed support for the Ukraine's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty.<sup>30</sup> In the most turbulent times Greece was aligned with the European line.

The turn in Greek foreign policy took place when SYRIZA formed a government, full of Eurosceptic and pro-Russian politicians in 2015. On January 26, 2015, his first day as Prime Minister, Tsipras met with the Russian ambassador to Greece Andrey Maslov.<sup>31</sup> In June 2015 Greece and Russia examined the possibility of extending the Turkish Stream project to

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<sup>29</sup> WEYMOUTH LALLY, Italy has done a lot – maybe too much, the Washington Post of 19 July 2018, <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/italy-has-done-a-lot--maybe-too-much/2018/07/19/dc81a292-8acf-11e8-8aea-86e88ae760d8\\_story.html?%20utm\\_term=%20.fe1294276783&nooredirect%20=%20on%20&utm\\_term=.fe50a671b4e0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/italy-has-done-a-lot--maybe-too-much/2018/07/19/dc81a292-8acf-11e8-8aea-86e88ae760d8_story.html?%20utm_term=%20.fe1294276783&nooredirect%20=%20on%20&utm_term=.fe50a671b4e0)>.

<sup>30</sup> Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos' presentation of the Hellenic Presidency's priorities to the European Parliament and responses to questions from MEPs. 20 January 2014, <<http://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/deputy-prime-minister-and-foreign-minister-venizelos-presentation-of-the-hellenic-presidencys-priorities-to-the-european-parliament-andresponses-to-questions-from-meps.html>>.

<sup>31</sup> DEMPSEY JUDY, Alexis Tsipras and Greece's Miserable Foreign Policy. Carnegie Europe of 29 January 2015, <<https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/58864>>.

Greece through a South European pipeline, but the discussions have remained stagnant. There has even been an attempt to investigate the intentions of Russia on the prospect of a loan, while the possibility of Greece's participation in the New Development Bank is currently under examination. Before the July 2015 referendum on memorandum, Tsipras had asked Putin for a \$10 billion loan so that Greece could return to drachma. In return, Russia only suggested \$5 billion before the construction of the Greek branch of the Turkish Stream.<sup>32</sup>

In 2016, Greece signed a defence partnership treaty with Russia. The Greek government claimed it was necessary to prevent the collapse of the country's defence industry.<sup>33</sup> Besides, Greek vessels repeatedly violated the Ukrainian legislation and international sanctions and docked at the ports of the occupied the Crimea.<sup>34</sup>

Greece is among the countries that has repeatedly raised the question of unproductivity of sanctions against Russia and their negative effect for the national economy. Imposed sanctions were extremely badly perceived in Greek society. Greek farmers say the embargo has already dealt a devastating blow to the country's agricultural economy. The left-wing Greek MEP Manolis Glezos wrote a letter to President Putin pleading not to impose counter sanctions on Greek food imports to Russia.<sup>35</sup>

After the September re-election and the dissolution of the most radical Left faction from SYRIZA, Greece began to concentrate more on migration problems, the reunification of Cyprus, creating its own zone of influence in the Balkans. Radically pro-Russian deputies and ex-deputies, and

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<sup>32</sup> PAPAPOPOULOS PAVLOS, Former KGB Agent, Flirting with SYRIZA, Travel to Moscow and the Loan which Was Never Given, *To Βήμα* of 19 July 2015, <<http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=723482>>.

<sup>33</sup> COUGHLIN CON, Nato's united front under threat after Greece signs arms deal with Russia, *The Telegraph* of 8 July 2016, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/natos-united-front-under-threat-after-greece-signs-arms-deal-wit/>>.

<sup>34</sup> GUCHAKOVA T., KLYMENKO A., p 34.

<sup>35</sup> Greek farmers hit hard by Russian sanctions against EU produce, *The Guardian* of 2014, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/13/greece-farmers-russian-sanctions-rotten-fruit>>.

some heads municipalities regularly visited the Crimea or Russia sponsored conferences and symposiums of radical European right and left without the further influence on country's policy or bilateral relations. With this relative moderation, the traditional stance on Greek-Russian relations came back into play, although prime-minister Tsipras continued to stress that he was to conduct innovative multidimensional diplomacy.<sup>36</sup>

Russia's actions in Crimea only fostered the rapprochement between Greece and Russia. It is not surprising, Russia has historically served for Athens as a counterbalance to the threat Turkey poses and the pressure exerted by such institutions as the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Athens understands its own security by the capacity to diversify risks and maneuver between several security providers. This approach weakens the EU's capacity to act coherently to ensure its internal and external security.

## 5. Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on the Security Policy of the Visegrad Group

The situation in Ukraine has been in the focus of the V4 Prime Ministers' attention since the very beginning. Thus in March 2014, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries adopted their statement expressing their deep concern "about the recent violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the fact that the Russian parliament had authorized military action on Ukrainian soil against the wishes of the Ukrainian government".<sup>37</sup>

Poland has been at the forefront of the European response to Russia's aggression. Unlike other Visegrad countries, condemnation of Russian

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<sup>36</sup> KOVAL NADIHA, Russia as an Alternative Security Provider: The Greek Perspective on The "Ukraine Crisis". IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS. 2017 (1), <[https://kse.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1.6.ENG\\_-Greece-Response-final.pdf](https://kse.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1.6.ENG_-Greece-Response-final.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries on Ukraine 2014, <<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/statement-of-the-prime>>.

actions against territorial integrity of Ukraine is seen on an all-country political scale, drawing criticism from the right, left, and centre. The annexation of the Crimea increased fears towards Russia that have always been very strong in Poland. Naturally, Poland has shown full support to sanctions against Russia and non-recognition policy. The annexation of the Crimea has also affected Poland's internal policies and its perception of Europe's security system.

Poland has been firm on abandoning Russian natural gas imports in favour of alternative import sources from Denmark and Norway. The LNG terminal focused on the imports from Qatar, Norway and the United States was put into operation in 2016. In 2018, Poland announced plans to revive the Baltic Pipe Project – construction of an underwater pipeline in order to pump Norwegian North Sea offshore gas.<sup>38</sup>

Poland has also increased its military spendings from 1,6% GDP in 2013 to 2,2% in 2015. As a part of Operation Atlantic Resolve, American soldiers have been deployed in Poland along with tanks and heavy equipment<sup>39</sup> serving as a response to the militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast. Since the annexation of the Crimea Polish state leadership has redoubled efforts to convince their partners and allies in the West that the enhancement of NATO Eastern flank is a very urgent need. Polish diplomacy instigated a demarche oriented toward persuading the leading NATO powers that the

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<sup>38</sup> MIROSLAVOV OLEG, Poland refuses LNG terminal in favor of the gas corridor with Norway, RuBaltic of 6 March 2018, <<https://www.rubaltic.ru/articles/06032018-poland-refuses-Ing-terminal-in-favor-of-the-gas-corridor-to-norway/>>.

<sup>39</sup> Kremlin Watch Report 2017. How do European democracies react to Russian aggression? Review of shifts in strategic & policy documents of EU28 following Russian aggression against Ukraine. <<https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/How-do-European-democracies-react-to-Russian-aggression.pdf>>.

cheapest and easiest manner to deter potential future Russian invasion on the Transatlantic Alliance is to deploy additional troops to the most susceptible to invasion countries.<sup>40</sup>

However, there are certain politicians from the Visegrad countries, who are sympathetic towards the behaviour of the Russian Federation. President of the Czech Republic Milos Zeman and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban are the key political allies of the Kremlin who promote the narratives used to justify Russia's occupation of the Crimea. The recent rise of populist and extremist political forces, directly or indirectly supported by Russia, and the spread of toxic content via "alternative" pro-Russian media and social networks has also become a serious issue in Slovakia.

Fight against Russian informational influence has become a topic of regular discussions in the states of the Visegrad group. However, the political response depends above all on the political will of the ruling elites. Pro-Russian orientation of the Hungarian government causes the absence of decisions in this field.<sup>41</sup> Slovakia does not consider Russian influence a threat, therefore, does not securitize disinformation campaigns and does not give a priority to strategic counter-measures. Besides, a "pragmatic" approach of Slovakia's Prime Minister Fico who regards Russia as an inevitable, unavoidable partner upon which Slovakia's economic development is dependent does not contribute to take adequate steps in combatting Russia's propaganda.

The Czech and Polish governments are more active in this area. In the Czech Republic, several documents have been adopted to address the issue of Russian disinformation. The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic adopted in 2015 warns against efforts of "some states to revise

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<sup>40</sup> FURGACZ PRZEMYSŁAW, Poland's Military Security Policy in the Context of the Russian Ukrainian War: Change or Continuity, *Ante Portas – Studia nad Bezpieczeństwem*, 2017, 1(8), <[http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-70e403e1-9b84-4f32-a8fb-19f7168961b6/c/APVIII\\_Furgacz.pdf](http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-70e403e1-9b84-4f32-a8fb-19f7168961b6/c/APVIII_Furgacz.pdf)>.

<sup>41</sup> Kremlin Influence Index 2017: Joint Research Report. – Kyiv, Detector Media, 2017, <[https://ms.detector.media/content/files/dm\\_iik\\_engl\\_pravka-compressed.pdf](https://ms.detector.media/content/files/dm_iik_engl_pravka-compressed.pdf)>.

the international order while using hybrid warfare including propaganda using traditional and new media, disinformation intelligence operations, cyber-attacks, political and economic pressures, and deployment of unmarked military personnel.”<sup>42</sup>

In 2016, the National Security Audit presented particular suggestions for strengthening the resilience of the Czech Republic such as the establishment of the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (CTHH) within the Ministry of Interior, creation of a system of education for public officials to make them more resilient towards foreign influence, launching active media strategies for important democratic institutions or measures concerning media law.<sup>43</sup>

However, concerning the practical steps, there are a lot of gaps and insufficiencies. Although the existing documents describe the threat well, they are not focused enough on practical measures. The establishment of CTHH is the only recommendation which has been implemented so far.

In 2015, Poland started to draft the Doctrine of Information Security as a response to the increase in hybrid threats, propaganda, disinformation, and psychological influence operation. The Doctrine is supposed to be the key document clarifying the scope of responsibilities and the mode of cooperation and coordination between the government, private institutions, and citizens. The document is still in the drafting phase

The Concept of Defence of the Republic of Poland adopted in 2017 considers the “aggressive policy of the Russian Federation, including the use of such tools as disinformation campaigns against other countries” as one of the main threats and challenges. However, the Concept does not contain any precise developments or tasks regarding information security. Mean-

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, Security Strategy of the Czech Republic, 2015, <[http://www.army.cz/images/id\\_8001\\_9000/8503/Security\\_Strategy\\_2015.pdf](http://www.army.cz/images/id_8001_9000/8503/Security_Strategy_2015.pdf)>.

<sup>43</sup> Government of the Czech Republic, National Security Audit, 2016, <<https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Audit-narodni-bezpecnosti-20161201.pdf>>.

while, the same year Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło announced the creation of a department of cyber security within the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.<sup>44</sup>

Taking into account the fact that cyber security management remains centralized in all Visegrad group countries and the engagement of private stakeholders has been so far underdeveloped, one can hardly expect a common approach to tackling the disinformation campaigns and Russia's aggressive foreign policy in the near future.

## 6. Impact of the Annexation of the Crimea on the Security Policy of the Baltic States

Since 2014 all three Baltic states have repeatedly demonstrate their support to Ukraine. All three countries share the position that the sanctions against Russia in connection with the illegal annexation of the Crimea should remain in force until Russia returns to the principles of international law.

On 25 June 2019, all three Baltic states voted against the decision to give back Russia's voting rights in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Besides, Latvia and Lithuania were the first European Parliaments which recognized the crimes committed by the Soviet Union against the Crimean Tatar people in 1944 as genocide.

However, Russia's annexation of the Crimea has not only made the Baltic States mobilize their support of Ukraine but also created a chance for Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to take measures to enhance their own security and strengthen the military sector.

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<sup>44</sup> Polish PM to set up new cybersecurity department, 2017, <<http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/329562,Polish-PM-to-set-up-new-cybersecurity-department>>.

In 2014, the Latvian parliament added amendments to the Law on National Security as part of the efforts to update the competence of the top state officials according to which the Latvian President will be required to immediately request help from NATO in case of a military attack.<sup>45</sup>

In 2015, Estonia adopted a new national defence act with its focus on new challenges in the security sphere, both in peacetime and during war. It provides for the role of the prime minister and the government to be strengthened in managing the state's defence, and is intended to facilitate the decision-making process concerning emergency situations.<sup>46</sup>

Lithuania has also joined in the preparations for a possible hybrid war. The law on the use of arms in peacetime was drafted as a new legal solution and adopted on 16 December 2014. According to it, the country's President would be entitled to sign a decree introducing martial law if foreign military troops appear on Lithuanian territory.<sup>47</sup>

Russia's annexation of the Crimea has made the Baltic states think about changes in the language policy. Thus, in April 2018, Latvian President Raimonds Vējonis signed amendments to the education law that would effectively put an end to all Russian-language schooling in the country by 2021. In July 2018, a new set of amendments to the Law on Institutions of Higher Education was announced banning Russian-language education programs in private universities and colleges. Previously, this restriction concerned only state universities.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> New Law Requires Latvian President to Request Help from NATO in Case of Attack, 5 June 2014, <<http://bit.ly/2bML4nC>>.

<sup>46</sup> National Defence Act, Riigi Teataja, 2015, <<http://bit.ly/2bPiEL>>.

<sup>47</sup> HYNDE-HUSSEIN JOANNA, The Baltic states on the conflict in Ukraine, 23 January 2015 <<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-01-23/baltic-states-conflict-ukraine>>.

<sup>48</sup> KIM LUCIAN. A New Law In Latvia Aims To Preserve National Language By Limiting Russian In Schools, 28 October 2018, <<https://www.npr.org/2018/10/28/654142363/a-new-law-in-latvia-aims-to-preserve-national-language-by-limiting-russian-in-sc>>.

In order to counter disinformation among population of Latvia and Lithuania, their governments have also taken legal measures to ban Russian media providers. In March 2016, the Latvian authorities initiated the shutdown of Sputnik after an investigation established a “clear link” between Sputnik and Dmitry Kiselev, the Director of Russia’s RT media empire who was facing targeted EU sanctions after Russia’s illegal annexation of The Crimea.<sup>49</sup>

The events in Ukraine escalated the concerns of the Baltic states about their own security. Altogether, since Russia’s annexation of the Crimea the three Baltic countries have managed to adopt a comprehensive approach to security and foreign policymaking.

## V. Conclusion

The annexation of the Crimea by the Kremlin has become a test for the EU unity. So far the EU has managed to develop a non-recognition and sanction-based approach towards Russia’s actions in the Crimea. However, there are certain doubts whether this response is really an effective means of deterrence. So far it has neither led to the return of the Crimea to Ukraine nor stopped Kremlin’s further aggressive actions in the Sea of Azov. The only consideration that occupies the minds of the EU officials is how to save the face and keep on implementing ambitious energy projects in collaboration with Russia. Therefore the declarative non-recognition policy of the EU and sanctions which can be easily circumvented is the furthest the EU can reach today. That reveals a number of weaknesses and hidden reputational risks in the EU’s response to the security challenges in its nearest neighbourhood.

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<sup>49</sup> WILSON MAILL, *Baltic Perspectives on the Ukraine Crisis: Europeanization in the Shadow of Insecurity. IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS* of October 2017, <<https://ideopol.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/1.3.ENG.%20Baltic%20Perspectives%20Final.pdf>>.

When the member states act in the Council of the EU, they continue to follow a “coherent” line. At the same time, each state has managed to develop bilateral cooperation policies based on their historical relation with Russia. Most western and southern European countries see Russia’s threat as less imminent. Terrorism and migration constitute bigger challenges to their own security. Besides, in Western and Southern European countries, we can often see a divide between national security professionals and the majority of the political class, which sometimes adopts an appeasement position towards the current Kremlin actions. Eastern Europe and Baltic states, on the other hand, are more vulnerable but feel in relative isolation as their narrative about Russia as the most direct threat to Europe’s security cannot gain traction across Europe. Such difference in priorities is only beneficial for Moscow, which focuses on bilateral relations with particular EU states and actively seeks to exploit differences between them.

Time does not play in favour of Ukraine. Leaders of the European states change, some of them tend to value the economic benefits of increased trade with Russia more than the principles of international law. Besides, since March 2014 when Russia annexed the Crimea, Europe’s attention has shifted to other crises such as Syria and rise of Euroscepticism which allowed Russia to only strengthen its regime on the peninsula. There is no guarantee that in several years the European states will not reconcile with the annexation of the Crimea following the US decision to recognize the Golan heights as part of Israel.

The return of the Crimea to Ukraine seems impossible in the nearest future as there is currently no framework to discuss the future of the peninsula. Moreover, such framework is unlikely to appear before the end of Putin’s rule. The latest decision to give back Russia’s voting rights in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe together with the complete absence of any changes in Russia’s position (and ignoring the order of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on the release of the captured Ukrainian sailors and vessels) but in return to pay budgetary

contributions to the Council of Europe demonstrates Europe's willingness to turn the page of this sad chapter without drawing certain lessons necessary mainly for Europe's future security.

## VI. Recommendations

The annexation of the Crimea concerns the most basic principles of Europe and therefore should be considered in a much broader context as a test of endurance for it. The challenge for the EU member states is how to secure its nearest neighbourhood and ensure Europe's own political, energetic and informational security. This task is not easy but therefore, the most important thing is to make sure that all the EU member-states follow the Brussels-based course.

Firstly, Europe should draw certain red lines in relations with Russia and make it clear that their trespassing will not be tolerated. Secondly, the European states should have a common position and vision of what should happen to have sanctions lifted. Besides, the EU member states should consider the application of additional sanctions on Russia in response to human rights violations in the Crimea and reputational sanctions for others who support Putin's aggressive behaviour. Thirdly, there should be more awareness on the need to cooperate in order to counter hybrid threats and any interference in the internal affairs of the European countries.

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